# SCIRIA openMind Lecture Series

# Tactile Perception and the Will to Figuration in Islamic Art and New Media Art

## A talk by Professor Laura U. Marks

**Wednesday, 23 April 2008, 6.30pm**
Chelsea College of Art & Design
Banqueting Hall
16 John Islip Street
London SW1P 4JU



Detail, Album containing the surah Al-Fâtihah, signed by Muhammad Kazim (Iran, 1802-3)

A striking parallel between contemporary algorithmic art and classical Islamic art is that both are full of examples of text trying to become figure, or image that reverts to its basis in text. In digital art, the medium consists of code, which may or may not be expressed as image, sound, action, etc. In religious Islamic art, the written and spoken word of the Qur'an are considered to be the direct speech of God. Yet despite the constraint of clear and unambiguous Sunni scripts, I observe a fascinating will to figuration in Sunni Islamic art whereby letters and words start to look like bodies. I will show examples Islamic artworks where the text seems inexorably to give rise to a figure, and digital artworks that struggle to make manifest code that wants to stay latent. I "explain" the "will to figuration" drawing from new media theory, the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and the thought on latency and manifestation developed in Shi'i Islam.

**Laura U. Marks**, a Canadian writer and curator of artists' media, is the author of The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses (2000) and Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media (2002). She is researching relationships between classical Islamic art and new media art, for a book prospectively titled Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art. Dr. Marks is Dena Wosk University Professor in Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, Canada. www.sfu.ca/~lmarks

## SCIRIA Research Unit

The SCIRIA Research Unit focuses on art and science collaborative research. Current areas of investigation include: creativity and cognition, multi-sensory computer interfaces and the virtual representation of cultural heritage artefacts. The Unit explores and develops the potential applications of emerging interface technologies, including haptics, gesture syntax and biometrics.

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**For more details please email:**
t.rupp@camberwell.arts.ac.uk